



Dear friends,

Last Friday we celebrated 17th May, and that's as 'Norwegian' as it gets! Even quite newly-arrived Africans have a chance to feel a bit Norwegian – just like I am reminded (after all these years) that I'm proud to be a bit African when once a year celebrating the UPLIFT Graduation with Ugandan brothers and sisters. At elated moments I've said that the graduation ceremony is like celebrating Christmas, Easter and 17th of May together. A wee exaggeration...

There are cultural differences, brought forth by geography and history since the beginning of civilization, and further refined to tapestries of indigenous traditions, - not least, visually! Yet, in the midst of that diversity, we share in the deeper features; colourfulness, musicality, joy, and not least, identifying with *each other*. Within the latter, a particularly profound trait can be found: Selfless effort for common good.



So, let us spend a minute to reflect on that phenomenon; what we call *volunteering*. In our country we believe '*dugnad*' is indigenous to Norway—voted in 2004 our national word (not unlikely, even by some who pitched in for school bands, sports or housing cooperatives without experiencing it *entirely* voluntary...) But the Finns have *talkoot*, Americans have *barn raising*, and Kenyans have *harambee*— 'all pull together'. Even the local Red Cross and 17th May celebrations call for volunteerism – as does people-to-people development assistance.

So far, the 17th May speech! You've guessed where I'm headed; we keep emphasizing the particular level of volunteering when telling people about UPLIFT and their local mentors. The saying, "it takes a village to raise a child", is believed to be an African one. At times I've thought that "it takes an UPLIFT *mentor* to



raise the capacity of a village". And, that he or she is free and willing [*frivillig* is Norwegian for voluntary] to sacrifice personal good for the benefit of the community. Not because one has free time in abundance; not because the effort itself might entail a salary; nor as a conveyer of the solidarity of the affluent with the poor—but out of a 'spiritual presence' of participation: This we do, and own, together. Or, to twist another well-known expression (*cogito, ergo sum*); "we *learn* [and develop], therefore we *are*" [here].

Wherefore, forefront enthusiasts of UPLIFT, with Doctor Hizzaya as chief inspirator, have been stressing the spiritual aspect of mentor motivation. This was true from the beginning, when a group of Bahá'ís in Uganda established UPLIFT—and rallied the support of Catholics, Protestants and Muslims in West Nile districts. Even in Norway some were attracted to the program(me), later to form Friends of UPLIFT and to be joined in Uganda as well as overseas – in a diverse community of friends of UPLIFT.



From an UPLIFT procession in Pakwach (Nebbi) December 2008

On the last day of June we (in Norway) shall convene for our annual general meeting, in the home of Liv and Michael Vitols in Oslo. [Care to join us, in the flesh?]

One challenge is for the AGM to consent to the recommendation from the recent FUP Board meeting, to step up last year's pledge by 1.000 USD to 12.000 USD. As referred in our February newsletter UPLIFT hopes to take it up a notch, now preparing functions that will strengthen its institutional capacity.

This preparation was also a focal issue during UPLIFT's board meeting and *refresher training* for mentors two weeks ago. They sent warm words of gratitude and optimistic greetings! At this end, we transferred 2.000 USD on 1st May (vs. 2.500 in February) – which means we're lagging behind a bit, because remaining money in the account carried over from last year was included in the February transfer.

Yesterday, however, checking our meagre account I found that a generous contribution had just been made, and a rainy day seemed brighter! Slowly by slowly, in Uganglish—did I mention that before?—we're gettin' there!

Warmest greetings,
on behalf of the Friends of UPLIFT Board,
Gunnar Lange-Nielsen, secretary